

Emerging from COVID, don't forget regular health checkups

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After more than a year of Stanislaus County residents enduring sacrifices to keep ourselves and loved ones safe amid the most pressing public health crisis of a generation, our state has finally been able to safely lift most of its COVID-19 restrictions.

California's safe reopening was the hard-earned result of people

doing their part to reduce or prevent the transmission of COVID-19 to family members, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. As we all celebrate the full reopening of California's economy and gradual return to normalcy in time for summer, let's not forget to schedule regular health care checkups for ourselves and our children.

While our community confronted the COVID-19 pandemic, other health priorities became secondary. Many individuals and families forewent routine and specialty care.

For instance, as households were often devoted through the pandemic to protecting each other

against COVID-19, there were steep declines in use of children's preventive health services that include scheduled well-child visits and immunizations. In Stanislaus County, there was a 12% drop in children ages 0-18 who got all their immunizations in 2020 compared to 2019.

Health Plan of San Joaquin (HPSJ) and our health care provider partners are concerned by these trends, especially as they relate to the unmet health care needs of children. In collaboration with our provider partners, HPSJ committed to enhancing community outreach efforts that encourage individuals and fam-

ilies to schedule primary care, well-child, and other clinical visits.

As our network of primary care providers, specialists, and clinic locations worked hard throughout 2020 to reopen their practices, HPSJ and provider partners like Golden Valley Health Centers, Livingston Community Health and Stanislaus County Health Services contacted members to coordinate preventive health services for children who may have missed scheduled clinical visits amid the pandemic.

CHILDREN ESPECIALLY NEED CHECKUPS

Going further, HPSJ staff partnered with Sta-

nislaus providers to educate on best practices related to telehealth visits throughout the pandemic. We joined with a medical group to implement drive-up immunization and well care visits. Local schools were also an important collaborator, helping us get information to parents on the importance of timely well care visits and immunizations for their children.

The pandemic created several health care access challenges for Stanislaus County residents. However, as the state reopens, more health care providers are welcoming patients back to catch up on preventive health care services.

These services are particularly important for the healthy development of children, who are recommended to receive various scheduled immunizations and screenings to identify diseases and conditions in their most treatable stages from birth through early adulthood.

Individuals and families, especially those with young children, are encouraged to schedule a checkup with a health care provider as soon as possible. Throughout Stanislaus County, providers and their practice staff are eager to help.

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